

Okefenokee

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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photo: J. Taylor

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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1936.
- Acres: 396,000 (650 square miles) roughly 35 miles north to south and 25 miles east to west.
- Located in Charlton, Ware, and Clinch counties, GA as well as Baker County, FL.
- Location summary: the refuges' northern boundary is located just south of Waycross, GA. The eastern boundary is just west of a line extending from Folkston, GA to Jacksonville, FL. The western boundary of the refuge parallels U.S. 441 from about Lake City, FL to Homerville, GA.
- Administers Banks Lake NWR.

Natural History

- The swamp is thought to be 6,000-8,000 years old. It is contained in a saucer-shaped depression that drains toward the south and southwest. Drainage from the swamp forms the headwaters for the St. Marys River and the Suwannee River.
- Indians inhabited the swamp for centuries and coined the term "Okefenokee" which means "land that trembles when you walk on it."
- The Swamp survived an attempt at draining in the late 1800's and was logged extensively in the early 1900's before becoming a refuge in 1936 by declaration of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Financial Impact of the Refuge

- 25-person staff generates a yearly payroll of \$1.3 million.
- Refuge hosts over 400,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget \$1.3 million.
- Resident and non-resident visitors generate in excess of \$64 million yearly to Charlton, Ware, and Clinch counties, GA.

Refuge Objectives

- To provide protection to the unique environmental qualities of the Okefenokee ecosystem.
- To provide optimum habitat and protection for endangered and threatened species.
- To provide optimum habitat for a wide diversity of fish, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.
- To provide opportunities for fish and wildlife oriented recreation, interpretation and environmental education.

Management Tools

- Prescribed burning.
- Wildlife and wildland research and surveys.
- Law enforcement.
- Interpretation/education.
- Wildfire (natural burns).
- Forest management.

Public Use Opportunities

- Trails (hiking and boating).
- Auto tour route.
- Fishing.
- Hunting.
- Observation towers.
- Boardwalks.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Wilderness canoe trails.
- Camping.

Calendar of Events

February: Crane Awareness Festival.

March: St. Marys River Clean-up.

April: National Wildlife Week Celebration, Earth Day Art Festival.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

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June: National Fishing Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, Okefenokee Festival, Halloween program, deer hunting.

December: Yule Log Ceremony.

Questions and Answers

Do alligators and snakes get in the boat with you?

These are wild animals and are more afraid of you than you are of them. Give them plenty of room, and they will avoid you.

What time do you feed the wildlife?

We do not feed, nor do we allow visitors to feed, wildlife. Feeding destroys their natural fear of people and encourages altercations between you and wildlife.

What is the most severe threat to Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge?

The proposed DuPont titanium strip mine adjacent to the refuge's eastern boundary threatens to permanently alter the swamp's hydrology, impact endangered species, and affect the wilderness experience of thousands of people. The threat from DuPont's strip mine will continue until an agreement between and among the opposing parties retires the titanium mineral rights forever. According to a nationwide survey, 78 percent of Americans oppose this project.

Why are your State Park and the Parks at the other entrances so different?

Okefenokee is a National Wildlife Refuge, not a park. Our primary emphasis here is protecting wildlife and habitat. People (visitors) and the recreational facilities they need for support are a secondary aspect of what we do. Visitor use is encouraged at refuges to educate the public about what we do for wildlife.

Where do I get the airboat ride?

There is no airboat use at Okefenokee except by Fish and Wildlife Service staff, who utilize them in maintenance, wildlife surveys, law enforcement, and search and rescue functions.